

prices are 30 percent higher than last year, and the cost of some home appliances has spiked nearly as much. Everyday essentials are getting pricier too. Milk is up 7 percent, and gas has jumped by more than 50 percent.

Consumers are feeling the real cost of what the White House Chief of Staff called “the most progressive domestic legislation in a generation.” But it didn’t have to be this way. These are exactly the conditions economists have been writing about and warning about for months.

Back in March, the Washington Post ran an ominous line:

For policy experts and even members of Biden’s own party, the improving picture is raising questions about whether the stimulus bill is mismatched—

Mismatched—

to the needs of the current moment.

Sure enough, not just any member of the President’s party but a top economist under both the last two Democratic administrations, Larry Summers, cautioned even earlier that a massive spending plan like the one Democrats were proposing could “set off inflationary pressures of a kind we have not seen in a generation.” Prescient, to say the least. That is exactly what has happened.

These exact fears have been realized, and experts are still clear about the source of the problem. “Labor shortages are the last thing that we need” with inflation on the rise. Until very recently, the White House has been unwilling to connect these dots.

States have been on their own to turn off the perverse incentives driving the shortages. To date, 25 States have done so, announcing suspensions of excessive Federal unemployment supplements. But across the country, Main Street has already been feeling the pinch.

In my State of Kentucky, the consequences of Democrats’ misguided spending are growing more serious. Small business owners in particular are nearing a breaking point. One restaurant owner in Clark County wrote to me to say that “each week it gets harder to create a full schedule. Restaurants are already reducing hours of operation. Next will come closing.”

I have heard the same story from constituents all over the Commonwealth. A sign manufacturer in Woodford County had to ask his staff to work as many as 10 hours of overtime each week just to keep up with demand. An outdoor supplies maker in McCracken County saw shipping costs quadruple in the past year. He can’t find a prospective employee who will even show up for an interview. He can’t even find a prospective employee who will show up for an interview. After 25 years of production, he is facing the prospect that his company may not be able to stay afloat.

The Commonwealth still has 90,000 fewer workers than we did before the pandemic. In the past year, the Consumer Price Index in Kentucky and

surrounding States has increased by a whopping 7 percent. The recovery teed up by smart, targeted, bipartisan policies last year has been buried under an ill-advised, self-inflicted avalanche—avalanche—of spending. Folks in Kentucky know all too well what happens when Democrats get carried away here in Washington. They know who ends up footing the bill back home.

Higher prices at the gas pump and the grocery store, just as families were hoping to put a year of sacrifices in the rearview mirror—these are the real-world effects of the Biden administration’s multitrillion-dollar economic debacle. These are the effects that Republicans and nonpartisan experts have warned about literally for months.

The American people are, nevertheless, resilient. Job creators, innovators, and skilled workers are ready. But as our economy slowly gets back up to speed, it certainly won’t be because Democrats stroked an outsized check; it will be in spite of it.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJÁN). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RUSSIA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today President Biden had the first of his meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin. He certainly has many important messages to convey to Mr. Putin about ongoing cyber attacks against us and our allies, the murdering of peaceful political opponents, and potential areas where we may be able to work together to deal with nuclear proliferation. The important discussion comes after several days where President Biden reaffirmed our relationship with our most important allies, those in the G7 and NATO. There were important announcements about leading the global COVID vaccine effort and standing up to the outrages perpetrated by nations around the world. But perhaps what was most important was that President Biden reasserted America’s role as a leading champion of democracy, security, and international norms.

I hope this spells an end—and I believe it does—of the unimaginable events that occurred in the previous administration: Coddling a foreign dictator such as Putin, dismissing our closest allies, and threatening the critical North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

President Biden knows that America’s leadership and its example are critical in leading shared efforts to stop this pandemic, tackle climate change, push back on rogue nations, and maintain global norms of behavior. President Biden also knows that how we manage our democracy here at home affects our ability to lead abroad.

The last administration bullied our allies, who watched in disbelief as it cozied up to the autocrats around the world. I have often said that a great deal of America’s influence around the world comes from the power of its ideals and values—critical and precious assets that we must nurture and never take for granted.

Our historic peaceful transfer of power has been a marvel for generations for much of the world. I will never forget the power and emotion felt walking with my friend the late Senator John McCain through Ukraine’s Maidan square, looking at the makeshift memorials to those who lost their lives hoping for a free and democratic Ukraine.

John McCain once said:

America’s greatest strength has always been its hopeful vision of human progress.

I couldn’t agree more. I couldn’t be more proud that President Biden is reaffirming this belief on the world stage this week. So let me take this moment to commend the President and his team for a timely, critical, and important visit with international allies and adversaries in recent days. It won’t solve all the problems we face, but we can be proud of this example of American leadership, generosity, and decency.

JUNETEENTH

Mr. President, this Saturday is Juneteenth, the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the end of slavery in America. Our Founders were brilliant and brave about many, many things, but they lacked the wisdom, perhaps the courage, maybe even the resolve, to face a poisonous contradiction at the heart of our new Nation. How could this Nation, founded on the belief that all people are created equal, condone and allow human slavery? Many of our Founding Fathers owned slaves themselves.

Eighty-five years after our founding, that unresolved contradiction plunged America into civil war. Halfway through that war, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that all persons held in bondage in rebellious States “are, and henceforth shall be free.”

His action meant little to most enslaved people in America. Most of those held in bondage didn’t gain freedom for another 2 years after the Civil War ended. For the 250,000 men, women, and children enslaved in the State of Texas, the wait was even longer. They learned of their freedom on June 19, 1865, 2 months after the Civil War ended, when Army MG Gordon Granger and 2,000 Union troops marched into Galveston, TX, with orders to enforce the Emancipation Proclamation.

One year later, African Americans in Galveston held America’s first Juneteenth celebration to commemorate that moment when they knew of the end of slavery in America. Formerly enslaved people wore their finest clothes, read the Emancipation Proclamation, and prayed together.